



Reports monitoring covid-19 pandemic in countries and regions of the Global South

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Violence against women: confinement as an ideal situation

It is estimated that approximately 4 billion people have been placed in confinement in recent months around the world (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2020). While this protective measure is necessary to slow the advance of the coronavirus, such confinement increases individual and social risk factors for gender-based violence by increasing isolation and barriers to seeking help and reporting (Lorente-Acosta, 2020).

This situation becomes even more worrying if we consider that currently more than 600 million women live in countries where domestic violence is not considered a crime; 35% of women in the world have been victims of violence, mostly spousal violence; and with respect to femicides worldwide, it is estimated that in half of the cases the author of the murder was a family member or partner of the victim (Estévez Domínguez & Martín García, 2019).

There are also other relevant situations involving violence against women and girls that should not be overlooked. On the one hand, the genital mutilation to which these girls and women are subjected in more than 30 countries around the world, many of which are on the African continent. The exact number of women who have undergone this practice is not known, but in 2017 a report by the *United Nations Children's Fund* (UNICEF) estimated the total to be at least 200 million women.

On the other hand, we know that worldwide about 750 million women and girls alive up to 2017 had been married before the age of 18. The majority of child marriage cases in the world take place in Africa, where 4 out of 10 girls are married before the age of 18, and 1 out of 7 is married before the age of 15. To a lesser extent, but equally worrying, cases of child marriage are observed in some countries in Asia and Latin America, according to the same UNICEF report (2017). The percentages of women aged 20-24 years who got married before age 18 in the different regions mentioned are shown in Figure 1.

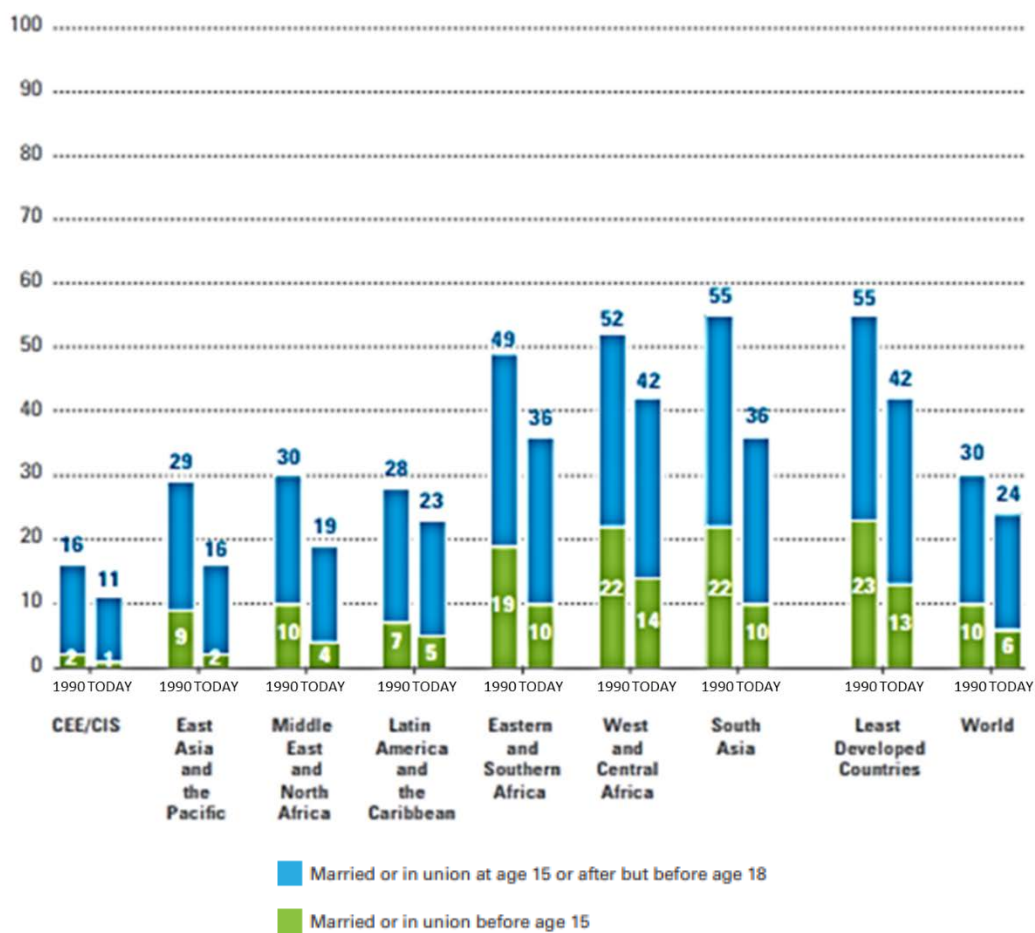


Figure 1. Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married or in union before age 15 and before age 18, by region. Source: UNICEF (2017).

Child marriage is known not only to widen the educational gap between men and women, but also to increase the likelihood that these girls will experience domestic violence. The Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* published part of a statement given by the director of the *Girls Not Brides* Association, Faith Mwangi-Powell, in which she expressed her concern about an increase in the number of child marriages in India, Africa and Latin America because of confinement and, above all, because of the crisis expected when it ends. The same concern has been expressed in other African media. The *Sudan News Gazette* shared part of an interview on *Radio Tamazuj*, where activist Hawa Adams calls on the government to protect school girls from unwanted pregnancies and early marriages during the pandemic. Activist Nkoile, who helps raise money for girls' education in Kenya, said in the *Daily Nation* newspaper that she fears the post-confinement crisis will increase the number of child marriages, as the reward of giving away her daughters in marriage would bring economic relief to families.

Another extremely alarming situation is the fact that confinement leads to cases of incest and family rape. In *The Voice of Botswana* newspaper, Deputy Commissioner of Police Service Dinah Marathe reported that cases of rape of girls between the ages of 2 and 13 had increased since confinement. These rapes were mostly carried out inside the victims' own homes by an immediate family member.

Both African and Latin American countries have launched news stories in the early stages of confinement that predicted an increase in gender-based violence, especially domestic violence. *The New Times* of Rwanda reviewed an article by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, which concluded that addressing domestic violence requires a lot of economic capital. This money, she says, must go to helplines, psychological assistance, and networks and tools in order to reach women who do not have access to a phone or the internet. In the same vein, the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* recently published a strategy aimed at women, suggesting that they place a rag in the window to alert their neighbors or relatives in case they need help and cannot ask for it because they are uncommunicated.

In a news item in the *United Nations* (UN) newspaper, gender-based violence during quarantine has been called "the other pandemic". UN Women's representative for Argentina and Paraguay, Florence Raes, says that while hotlines for women have been strengthened and shelters have been opened for women who need to leave their homes, since confinement began reports of gender-based violence have increased by 39% in Argentina and 50% in Paraguay. Sebastián Essayag, a member of the *United Nations Development Programme* (UNDP), told the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* that in Mexico calls for help from women that suffer violence increased by 80% during the quarantine and by 43% in Peru. In Colombia, according to the newspaper *El Tiempo*, the situation is even more alarming. In that country, calls from women suffering from gender-based violence increased by 230%. It must be taken into account that many women are not encouraged to report or cannot do so because those who commit violence against them generally have control over their mobile phones, so in all cases these numbers are estimated to be higher.

In addition to the large increase in reports of gender-based violence in Latin America during confinement, another concern is the number of femicides. Unfortunately, femicides are daily news in the media in different Latin American countries, and during confinement they have not stopped. On this issue, the *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean* (ECLAC) states in a study that in 2018 a total of at least 3,287 women were victims of femicide. This study, which is the most updated they present, was prepared with official information provided by 18 Latin American countries and Spain (Figure 2).

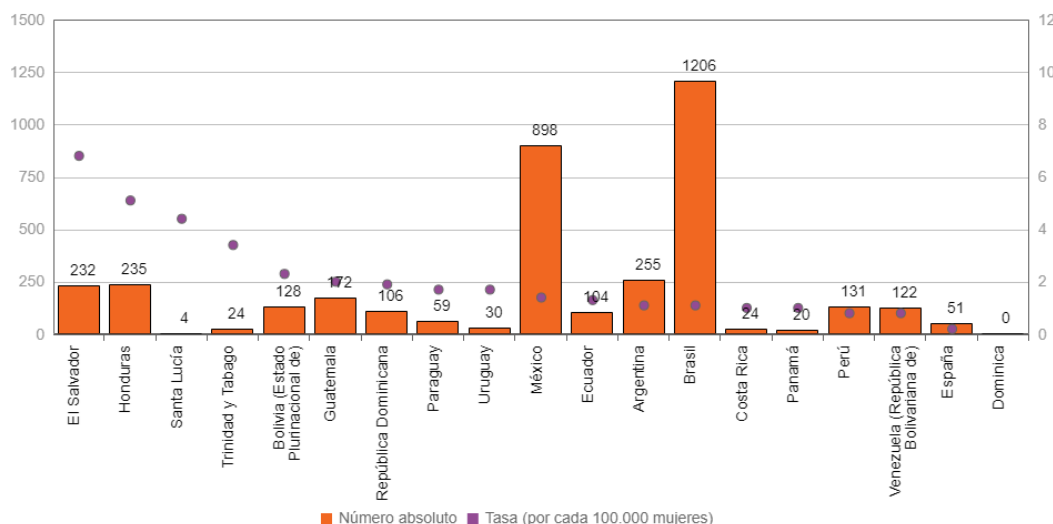


Figure 2. Femicides in 18 Latin American countries and Spain, in absolute numbers and rates per 100,000 women. Source: ECLAC (2018).

The fight against gender violence and femicide in Latin America has been going on for years, but it became visible only five years ago. On June 3, 2015, the first massive women's march took place in Argentina with the shouts of "*Ni una menos, vivas nos queremos*", which means something like "Not one less, we wanna be alive", after the femicide of a 14-year-old girl by her boyfriend came to light. Subsequently, several countries in the Americas and Europe have followed the example and carried out these same mobilizations. As of 2015, every June 3 in Argentina, women march to demand equality, security and, basically, to stop killing them. This year, the confinement has not allowed the massive mobilization to take place, but this has not stopped the demands since they were made from the balconies and social networks. According to the *Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity*, since the confinement began in Argentina, 55 femicides have been registered, almost one per day, with the current or former partner of the victim being the author of 68% of them. According to a news item published by the newspaper *La Razón*, in Chile the cases of femicide during the quarantine have so far been one third of the total cases committed each year on average. In Colombia there have been 19 femicides at this stage, and in Mexico 163 femicides were reported up to 24 April.

In conclusion, it is clear that the circumstances of the confinement create ideal conditions for violence against women. This is reflected in the increase in reports of gender-based violence in various countries in Africa and Latin America, as well as the alarming number of femicides that have been committed. It is also reflected in the increase in intra-family abuse and the inevitable child marriages that are expected to take place because of the post-pandemic crisis.

References:

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The research group BIOCOS-SC from the Polytechnic University of Catalonia is in contact with different research groups and governmental offices in order to jointly predict the evolution of the pandemic covid-19. Moreover, we follow up local media in 35 African countries and 9 Latino American countries and complemented it with interviews to field experts.

<https://biocomsc.upc.edu/en/covid-19>